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## LETTER FROM AMERICA • DANIEL BELLOW MIDNIGHT COWBOY

George Bush's last stand.

**I**N A LAST gesture, President George W. Bush in his final sixty days in office did his best to tear down the laws put in place for the protection of America's wilderness. With a few pen strokes, Bush opened up 2 million acres of the Rocky Mountains to oil-shale exploitation, did away with pollution controls on coal plants, and exempted mountaintop strip mining operations and industrial scale hog farms from the Clean Water Act. He even tried to weaken regulation of a pollutant in drinking water that can affect brain development in children.

The editors of Resurgence were shocked when they read about it in *The Guardian*, and they wrote to me, asking me to interpret this latest American outrage. "Is there some kind of action afoot to reverse all this deregulation? How do the American public feel about this? Is there anything being done to stop him?" So with the cynicism that has grown like a carapace over my soul these past eight years, as the stuff of political satire has become reality here in the Land of the Brave and the Free, I replied:

Dear Satish, Lorna and Jo,

Even though George W. Bush is our worst president since James Buchanan, what he is doing here is so common in American politics that it even has a name. These are Midnight Regulations, and every president since Jimmy Carter has made them. A man gets to the end of his term, sees all that he's left undone, and by his Midnight Regulations shall ye know him. Bush is a corporate man whose presidency has left us with a reeking slag-heap where our economy and our environment used to be. It follows that his Midnight Regulations should lift restrictions on those who destroy Nature, torture helpless animals and poison the land.

This is nothing new. The former oil, gas, mining and timber executives Bush appointed to head the relevant federal departments have been dishing up our natural resources to their once and future employers

since day one. These Midnight Regulations represent their wish list: the things they dream about when they're alone in the executive men's room. As spineless as Congress and the media have been all this time, Bush never could have got it past them in the light of day, so he tries to sneak it through as regulation under cover of night. There is, naturally, a public outcry, led by the Natural Resources Defense Council and the movie star Robert Redford. Everyone knows most of it will be cancelled by the incoming Obama administration.

Bush is almost universally discredited. Even Richard Nixon in the hour of his resignation had a higher approval rating. Look, the Democrats ran a black man for president and he won. I am enormously proud of my country. When I was born, Jim Crow was still the law. But there's no way we'd have a black family in the White House if Bush had not screwed up so badly. He knows it, too.

I predict the relatively small noise over this affair will be drowned out by howls of outrage from coast to coast when Bush issues presidential pardons to everyone who might ever testify against him for violating US and international laws. All those tame lawyers who told him what he wanted to hear, all those

CIA operatives and generals, Vice President Dick Cheney – I expect them all to receive a presidential pardon, which, unlike an agency regulation, is forever.

THIS BRINGS ME to the most serious and lasting damage done by Bush and Cheney – not to our mountains and rivers, or even to our international reputation, but

